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Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern (Book Review)

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viewed by James C. Schaap, Instructor in English, Dordt College.

The authors preface this handbook by saying that *Basic English Revisited* is "intended to be carried around in hip pockets and purses of high school students." Judged by this purpose, the handbook succeeds, for where else could high-school students find such accessible answers to such diverse problems as when to use a hyphen, or how to treat alkali poisoning? The writers are to be commended for the wide range of information that they were able to collect in just a few more than 100 pages. Combined with the traditional student handbook given to high-school freshmen, *Basic English Revisited* could give any high-school student a thorough, understandable, and workable basis for classes in English, as well as in speech, mathematics, geography, and even driver's education.

The title may be more exploitative of current problems with the term "basic skills" than indicative of the nature of the handbook. Combined with a good grammar manual, *Basic English Revisited* might indeed "revisit" Johnny's basic problems, but by itself, the manual would only serve to provide necessary definitions, a few of which may be less than crystal clear. However, most of the sections of the book are devoted to what are commonly called "communications skills," and the authors do not intend the handbook to serve as a workbook. Nevertheless, by itself, *Basic-English Revisited* will do less to cure Johnny's ills than it will to provide him with directions to the clinic.

Far from a fatal flaw, that apparent weakness may actually be its strength. Instead of spending hundreds of pages on grammar exercises and endlessly illustrated rules of punctuation, this handbook is intended only to provide the facts in a form that makes them easily available.

Because of its range, *Basic English Revisited* does offer an important benefit not easily foreseen, both for an English department and for an entire faculty. It will provide a guide for the formal aspects of assignments from all departments. Sample footnotes, bibliographical forms, even a complete term paper are included. Adoption of this book as a basic text would mean that all departments would have a handy common reference to the elements of style and research writing, thereby erasing inconsistencies which students sometimes feel between different teachers or departments.

There is much to praise in *Basic English Revisited*. The manual is put together attrac-

tively, the illustrations are both catchy and relevant, a thorough index makes even the most trivial information readily available, and an extensive list of commonly misspelled words is a boon to anyone who has spent more time sitting than standing during spelling bees. Moreover, the price is right.

The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern, by David Moberg, Rev. Ed., Philadelphia: Holman, 1977. Reviewed by Rich Buckingham, Instructor in Psychology.

Moberg, formerly at Bethel College in Minneapolis and presently Professor of Sociology at Marquette University, has provided us with a sociological analysis of the various divisions that have arisen among Christians regarding the necessity, motives, aims, and strategies of Christian involvement in the wider culture. Moberg is primarily concerned with the division between the so-called "social gospelers" and "soul-winners," that is, between those emphasizing social action and those favoring individual evangelism. Although this is not to be taken as an absolute division, it does characterize the internal relations of many evangelical denominations and the external relations between the evangelical and the more liberal denominations. Most of the book relates directly to this cleavage and the possibility of evangelicalism overcoming its neglect of social concern without losing its foundation upon the historic Christian world-and-life-view.

"The Great Reversal" aptly describes what Moberg takes to be a definite and radical shift in the cultural response of evangelical Christianity from about 1910 to 1930, with evangelicals taking a less sympathetic and less direct interest in the cultural issues and problems of the day. Moberg assumes, with some evidence, that before this period, evangelical Christians exhibited a much more adequate degree of social involvement. Thus, "The Great Reversal" in 1910-30. The "fundamentalist-modernist" controversy played no small role in this reversal, the effects of which were felt in most major denominations of North America.

Two chapters in particular stand out: "Barriers to Effective Social Concern" (ch. 5) and "Social Sin" (ch. 7). The former considers various attitudes and behaviors of the evangelical life-style that vitiate an active social concern. For example, there is the attitude of neutrality, in which the failure to act may prove to be

against the will of God. Also, individualism, the destructive effects of which are nicely summed up in the following passage:

American revivalism ever since the days of Finney has emphasized an individualistic approach in which sin is reduced to simple, personal proportions and the solution to it similarly is very personal—the regeneration of individual souls. The essence of the pietism which revivalists extol is alleged ultimately to have “contributed more toward making men conform than reform,” thus, contributing to making America one of the most materialistic and secularistic nations in the world. (pp. 88-90)

Such individualism characterizes not only historic pietism, but other traditions as well. The frequent tendency of conservatives to identify also with political and economic conservatism is also a major barrier, brought about in effect by conformity to a present world system.

Chapter 7, “Social Sin” refutes standard arguments that sin is merely personal and also rejects evangelism aimed at saving individuals as being the only Christian option. Moberg also discusses the possibilities of revolution in the overcoming of social sin in its institutionalized form.

Most of the rest of the book is concerned with the attempts of evangelicals to “reverse” the great reversal in theory (ch. 8) and in practice (ch. 9). Chapter 9 is a summary of evangelical attempts at church renewal and more active social involvement. I found it encouraging to survey Moberg’s evidence that Christians from many different traditions and persuasions are trying to articulate normative principles and procedures for Christian social action. Even some of those traditions often considered to be pietistically inclined, for example, the neo-Charismatics, Baptists, and Mennonites, are busy restudying their societal obligations in the light of Biblical teachings.

I am in agreement with Moberg’s statement on page 211: “Even congregations and denominations can be likened to the parts of the Body of Christ. No two parts have the same spiritual gifts. By working together we can accomplish collectively that which we cannot do alone. This can help to overcome the sin of individualism as well as to eliminate a sense of guilt for not doing directly everything that needs to be done.” Tragically, so many of us evangelicals are preoccupied with fraternal conflict—as if other Christians are our enemy—that such collective action seems remote.

In sum, I recommend this book for the

widest possible reading.

The Clockwork Image: A Christian Perspective on Science by Donald M. MacKay, Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1974, 112 pages. Reviewed by Harry Cook, Associate Professor of Biology.

MacKay’s book discusses the relationship between science and the Christian faith. This relationship is a problem not yet adequately resolved in the Christian community and for this reason the book merits close attention. Because MacKay states his ideas clearly and simply and often uses the British idiom, his style is engaging. The book is very readable and develops its main argument well. It is a valuable contribution to the discussion among Christians about foundational problems in science.

Donald M. MacKay is professor of communication at the University of Keele in Great Britain, where he conducts research into the physiology of the brain. In writing about the relationship between science and faith, he performs a valuable service to the Christian community, for to many this relationship is unnecessarily antagonistic. MacKay has also lectured widely on this topic and is slated to be the 1979 lecturer for the Consortium of Reformed and Presbyterian Colleges, of which Dordt College is a member.

According to MacKay, many Christians feel that “. . . if God had anything to do with the events of the natural world, there must be something scientifically odd about them. The trouble was that, as science advanced, there was a steady shrinkage of the class of events that were ‘odd’ enough for God to be brought in to explain them. . . . The problem of finding room for God seemed to grow continually more embarrassing” (pp. 56-57). MacKay rejects this way of looking at the problem. He states, “The essential point made in the Bible, and in a sense, I think, the key to the whole problem of the relation of science to the Christian faith, is that God, and God’s activity, come in not only as extras here and there, but everywhere. If God is active in any part of the physical world, he is in all” (p. 57). The reason, therefore, that we can study natural phenomena and formulate scientific laws about them is God’s upholding hand, His faithfulness.

Our belief in this faithful God and our scientific investigations are complementary and do not compete, MacKay suggests. Complemen-